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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 05/15/07

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4) Abe Cabinet support rate recovers to 43% in latest Asahi poll

North Korea problem:

5) Prime Minister Abe telephones President Bush to confirm that US will continue to give consideration to abduction issue in deleting North Korea from terror list

6) Abe aide admits Secretary Rice stated that abduction issue not a condition for North Korea being on list of terrorist-sponsoring nations

7) Government confirms North Korea has new missile with striking range that includes Guam

Constitutional revision:

8) National referendum bill passes Diet, setting procedures leading to amending Constitution

9) Abe is out in front of his party in pushing constitutional revision, for many in the LDP prefer to proceed cautiously

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- 3) Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei)

Prime Minister's schedule, May 14

08:18

Met with Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shimomura at the Kantei.

08:59

Lower House Iraq Reconstruction Assistance Special Committee meeting.

12:06

Government-ruling camp liaison council meeting at the Kantei. Secretary General Nakagawa and head of the LDP Caucus in the Upper

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House Mikio Aoki remained.

13:53

Met with Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Nemoto, followed by LDP Policy Research Council Chairman Nakagawa.

14:27

Met with Vice MLIT Minister Tsuji, followed by Nemoto.

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15:06

Met with MEXT Minister Fuyushiba. Then met with Executive Council Chairman Niwa, followed by Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Matoba.

16:45

Met with State Minister for National Security Koike.

17:02

Party executive meeting in the Diet.

17:46

Met with Kennedy Center President Kaiser at the Kantei.

18:20

Met with Lao Prime Minister Bouasone.

20:55

Telephoned US President Bush. Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki, Foreign Ministry North American Affairs Bureau Director General Nishimiya and Middle East and African Affairs Bureau Director General Okuda were present.

21:29

Arrived at the official residence.

4) Poll: Cabinet support rebounds to 43%

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
May 15, 2007

The rate of public support for Prime Minister Abe and his cabinet was 43% in a telephone-based nationwide public opinion survey conducted by the Asahi Shimbun on May 12-13. The nonsupport rate for the Abe cabinet was 33%. In the last survey taken in April, the support rate was 40%, with the nonsupport rate at 38%. Compared with these figures, the nonsupport rate in the survey this time showed a striking decrease. The cabinet support rate, which stayed low in the early months of this year, rebounded in the last survey. This time, the support and non-support margin has widened further.

The rate of male support for the Abe cabinet increased from 36% in the last survey to 44% this time. The rate of female support was 42%. The rate of support among men topped that among women for the first time since the Abe cabinet came into office in September last year. The nonsupport rate decreased from the last survey in all age brackets, and the support rate topped the nonsupport rate among all generations but those in their 30s. The support rate among those with no particular party affiliation was 27%, leveling off from the last survey.

In the breakdown of public support for political parties, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party stood at 33% (31% in the last survey), with the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) at 14% (14% in the last survey). The proportion of those with no particular party affiliation was 45% (46% in the last survey).

Polling methodology: The survey was conducted over the telephone on a computer-aided random digit dialing (RDD) basis. Respondents were chosen from among the nation's voting population on a three-stage random-sampling basis. Valid answers were obtained from 1,005 persons (57%).

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5) Bush to consider abductions

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
May 15, 2007

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe talked with US President Bush over the telephone yesterday evening for about 20 minutes. Abe and Bush confirmed their intention to call on North Korea to completely carry out the initial steps, such as shutting down and sealing nuclear-related facilities, in compliance with an agreement reached at the six-party talks. Bush reiterated that he would consider the abduction issue in delisting North Korea as a terror sponsor.

The telephone conversation was held at Bush's request. In late April, when Abe met with the president in the United States, Bush told Abe that he wanted to hear about Abe's Middle East visit after his US visit. In the talks yesterday, Abe and Bush agreed to ask Iraq's neighbors to work together for Iraq's reconstruction. The two also concurred on the importance of a peaceful solution to the issue of Iran's nuclear development program. In addition, they also agreed to step up bilateral cooperation on the issue of climate change, too.

In this connection, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hakubun Shimomura revealed in a press conference yesterday that US Secretary of State Rice, who was in the summit meeting in late April, had said that resolving the abduction issue was not a legal precondition to delist North Korea as a terror sponsor.

"The president and the secretary also said the United States would continue to support Japan on the abduction issue," Shimomura said. With this, he underscored that Japan and the United States were not out of step. Yesterday's telephone talks appear to be aimed at denying such a view.

6) Shimomura: Rice said that settlement of abduction issue not a condition for delisting North Korea

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
May 15, 2007

During the Japan-US summit in late April, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice explained regarding the US designation of North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism, "In light of US law, it has an act of terrorism against the United States in mind, and a settlement of the issue of Japanese nationals abducted to the North is not a condition for removing (North Korea) from our list (of terrorism-sponsoring states)," Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hakubun Shimomura revealed in a press conference yesterday. The Japanese government did not introduce Rice's statement in a press conference held immediately after the summit in Washington.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had a telephone conversation with US President George W. Bush for about 20 minutes last night. Given the fact that Rice indicated in the Japan-US summit in late April that a settlement of the abduction issue was not a condition for delisting (North Korea), Abe said to Bush: "The president's strong position is truly encouraging." Abe and Bush agreed that it was regrettable that North has yet to implement the initial steps, as was agreed upon in the six-party talks (in February).

7) Gov't confirms North Korea's new missile; Guam possibly within range

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
May 15, 2007

North Korea showed a new intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) for the first time in last month's parade that commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Korean People's Army. In this regard, the Japanese government has confirmed its existence, sources said yesterday. The United States seems to have analyzed satellite images and conveyed its analysis to Japan and South Korea. The new missile's range is estimated at 3,000-5,000 kilometers. This outranges the Rodong (1,300 km) and the Taepodong (over 1,500 km). US bases on Guam are also within its range.

Vice Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya, meeting the press yesterday, avoided confirming that the information was from the United States. However, Moriya said he was aware of North Korea's missile development. "We will continue to pay close attention to their development," Moriya stressed. Moriya indicated a negative view about the possibility of tipping missiles with nuclear bombs. "I can't say anything definite," Moriya said. "At this point," he added, "we don't know whether they have acquired that capability." The new missile is believed to be a remodeled submarine-launched ballistic missile.

8) National referendum bill passes Diet; government to set up panel on lowering age of majority to 18

YOMIURI (Top Play) (Full)
May 15, 2007

In response to the passage in the Diet of the national referendum bill, which sets legal procedures for revising the Constitution, the government has decided to establish in the Cabinet Office a "study committee on review of provisions pertaining to the age for eligible voters" (tentative name) tasked with discussing amendments to relevant laws to lower the age of majority from the current 20 to 18. The panel, to be composed of vice ministers from each government ministries and agencies with Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Junzo Matoba as chairman, will aim at completing necessary legislation by 2010, when the law goes into effect.

In a House of Councillors plenary session yesterday, the bill was approved with a majority from the ruling coalition - the Liberal Democratic Party and the New Komeito. The law sets the minimum age for eligible voters at 18 or older in principle but will be 20 or older until related laws such as the Public Offices Election Law are revised. The law stipulates: "The government shall discuss relevant provisions in the Public Offices Election Law, the Civil Law, and other laws and take necessary legal measures."

In debate on legal amendments, the focus is likely to be on the Public Offices Election Law, which provides for the age for eligible voters, and on the Civil Law, which sets the age of majority. In addition, more than 100 relevant laws, including the Juvenile Law and traffic laws, will be affected if the age of majority is revised to 18.

Once such laws are revised, the age at which people become adults will be 18 in view of the law. In such a case, the perceptions of

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what an ideal society should be will naturally be changed significantly.

A revision of the Public Offices Election Law will increase the number of eligible voters in national and local elections. In the latest population census (Oct. 1, 2005), Japanese nationals aged 18 to 19 totaled about 2.71 million. Should the age of adulthood under the Civil Law is lowered to 18, those aged at 18 or 19 will be allowed to engage in transactions in assets, as well as to get

married even without parents' consensus.

Even so, some in the government and the ruling coalition remain cautious about revising laws related to the age of majority. Many LDP members are negative about amending the laws to prohibit minorities from smoking and drinking. On a revision of the Juvenile Law, as well, the dominant view in the government is that "it is difficult to find reasons to lower the age of majority."

Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirofumi Shimomura also just said in a press conference yesterday: "The study panel will conduct comprehensive studies, such as the need for revisions."

9) National referendum bill enacted under mood of constitutional revision; But even pro-constitutional revision advocates dissatisfied with the bill

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Slightly abridged)
May 15, 2007

Yu Takayama

The national referendum bill was enacted into law yesterday, setting the procedures for constitutional revision 60 years after the current Constitution was established. This move is welcomed by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), whose party policies include amending the Constitution, but there is a noted lack of enthusiasm. One reason for this is perhaps because of a freeze on making any constitutional revision proposals for three years after the bill becomes law. Another reason is because Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's constitutional revision policy lacks a strategic approach, with an emphasis simply placed on creating a mood for constitutional revision, thereby perplexing lawmakers even in his party who are knowledgeable about the Constitution. When it comes to how constitutional revision will proceed in the future, uncertainties still remain with the collapse of the cooperative ties between the ruling and opposition parties.

The procedures for constitutional revision have now been prepared, but no amending of the Constitution shall be made in the three years ahead. How to actual amend the Constitution, give shape to constitutional revision proposals, gather support for such proposals, and shape public opinion are open questions.

However, the cooperative relations among the LDP, its junior coalition partner New Komeito, and the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto or DPJ) collapsed with Abe's announcement in his New Year speech in January of his intention to make constitutional revision a campaign issue in the upcoming Upper House election. When it comes to specific constitutional proposals, Abe has emphasized the LDP's draft constitution (created in 2005), but LDP lawmakers advocating constitutional amendment point out the need for drafting a second version of a new constitution. One member of

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the Lower House Special Committee on the Constitution complained: "The prime minister made an unnecessary remark, only to cause ripples in the Minshuto and the New Komeito. It's unclear whether the prime minister is really serious about revising the Constitution."

Meanwhile, LDP Secretary-General Hidenao Nakagawa told a press briefing yesterday: "Based on our draft constitution already publicized, we want to play a part in leading a national movement for establishing a new constitution by visiting various locations across the country." Nakagawa is apparently giving backing to Abe's effort for creating a move for constitutional revision.

There is also a rift between the LDP and the New Komeito over the question of the right to collective self-defense. The New Komeito does not allow Japan to exercise that right. New Komeito Representative Akihiro Ota told reporters yesterday: "We will endeavor to come up with a proposal for adding modifications to the current Constitution in three years after full debate." Ota thus indicated his alarm toward the rising mood for constitutional revision as aimed at by Abe.

10) Rebel Hideo Watanabe of DPJ disturbing factor for solidarity

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
May 15, 2007

The national referendum bill was yesterday approved by the Upper House during its plenary session. Former Postal Minister Hideo Watanabe of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) voted for the bill against the party's policy. His action has dampened the solidarity of the DPJ leadership, including party head Ichiro Ozawa, in the run-up to the Upper House election in the summer.

Watanabe after the voting stressed that he acted based on his principle, "I must resign as politician, if I give in on the constitutional issue."

The leadership will strictly reprimand him in the name of Upper House Diet Policy Committee Akira Gunji. It intends to refrain from taking a severer punishment, such as suspension of his party membership or recommendation to bolt, considering the fact that this was his "first offense" -- a relatively light punishment taken in order to contain a shock in the party.

However, four other members also abstained from the plenary session on account of schedules in their constituencies and some business. Though the leadership does not regard their abstention as rebel, lawmakers who are regarded as anti-Ozawa were among the four. The incident is certain to become a disturbing factor for the leadership.

Some conservative DPJ members are sympathetic with Watanabe, with one veteran lawmaker noting, "An overwhelming number of lawmakers are secretly in favor of the national referendum bill." What happened in the voting has spread a stir in the DPJ.

11) DPJ mum until Upper House election

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Excerpts)
May 15, 2007

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Takashi Sudo

The main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) was opposed to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's stance of making constitutional revision a campaign issue in the upcoming Upper House election, and advocates of constitutional revision in the party also remained mum. Those advocates are concerned that their opposition to the national referendum bill may be taken to mean they are pro-constitution forces, but most of them intend to follow President Ichiro Ozawa, who has emphasized his confrontational position against Abe, until the Upper House election is over.

Minshuto Secretary-General Yukio Hatoyama, when asked by reporters yesterday in Sapporo City about the enactment of the national referendum bill without approval from the opposition parties, criticized the ruling camp: "This is a significant flaw in creating an environment for constitutional revision (which requires a concurring vote of two-thirds or more of all the members of each House)."

12) National referendum bill obtains Diet approval: Rocky road ahead for revisions of related laws

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
May 15, 2007

The passage of the national referendum bill (legislation for procedures for constitutional amendment) yesterday has left many challenges to tackle. The legislation stipulates that voting age is in principle 18 and older. The condition is, however, that there must be consistency with the current 20 and older requirement for adults and the present age eligible for voting. The government will rush to undertake coordination of views on revisions of relevant

laws, including the Public Office Election Law, civil law, etc. There is also the possibility of discussions of regulating public servants' deed and the media flaring up again.

Eighteen and older as voting age will require revision to current adult requirement; Concern over excessive regulation on public servants' deed

The bill set an age eligible for voting at 18 and older, based on the judgment that it is necessary to listen to views of a generation who will shoulder the future. Since this is greatly different from other laws, the bill was attached with an additional clause, which stipulates that a necessary legal measure should be taken within three years.

However, there are many related laws, including the Juvenile Law, the National Pension Law, and the Law for Preventing Minors from Drinking. Though it may not be necessary to amend all related laws, it is trying to decide which laws should be amended.

The government and the ruling camp will look into the matter with the possibility of lowering the age eligible for voting and the age considered as an adult. However, since amending these laws will have a major social impact, a cautious argument is deep-seated.

The prevailing view is that in the event amendments to related laws cannot be made in time, it is all right to apply 20 and older as the age eligible for a national referendum. However, opposition parties and some experts are maintaining that the enforcement of the

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national referendum law should be nullified.

A clause prohibiting public servants, schoolteachers and staffers from calling for voting for or against constitutional revision is also stirring up arguments. The regulation would be excessive, if it places a total ban, including a ban on the expression of private views. Consideration into revisions to the National Civil Service Law and the Local Public Service Law has been incorporated in the additional clause. However, chances are that the matter may be up to how the law is applied.

As media control, the national referendum law totally bans fee-charging TV and radio advertisements from 14 days before the voting day. The aim is to secure an opportunity for the people to ponder their course of action in a cool-headed manner. However, opposition parties once called for a total ban on such advertisements, noting that organizations with funds could lead public opinion into a certain direction.

An article calling for TV broadcasters to bear in mind political impartiality, based on the Broadcast Law, has been incorporated. Each media institution should voluntarily decide how to maintain impartiality. The National Association of Commercial Broadcasters in Japan is against the article with chairman Michisada Hirose noting, "We are concerned that the article will pave the way for public power to interfere in the media."

Opposition parties, such as the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), during Diet deliberations called for the introduction of a minimum voter turnout system, under which if a voter turnout falls below a certain set rate, the voting itself becomes invalid. The Upper House characterized item in its additional resolution the issue as a future agenda. Behind its decision is the judgment that if a voter turnout is 40%, the Constitution can be amended with approval by a little over 20% of all eligible voters, a situation that requires some form of brake.

13) Amendment to Iraq Special Measures Law approved by Lower House panel despite opposition from opposition parties

MAINICHI (Page2) (Full)
May 15, 2007

Ryuko Tadokoro

The bill aimed at extending the Iraq Special Measures Law for another two years was approved by a majority from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its junior coalition partner New Komeito at a meeting yesterday of the Lower House Special Committee on Prevention of Terrorism and Iraq Assistance. The bill calling for scrapping that law introduced by the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto or DPJ) was rejected. A supplementary resolution calling on the government to discuss when to withdraw Self-Defense Forces (SDF) troops from Iraq while watching the situation in Iraq was adopted by a majority from the LDP, the Minshuto, and the New Komeito.

The bill is to be approved today by the Lower House plenary session and be sent to the Upper House. It is expected to be enacted into law during the current session of the Diet. Following this passage of the bill, the government intends to continue the deployment of Air-Self Defense Force (ASDF) troops, who are transporting goods and

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personnel of the coalition forces and the United Nations from Kuwait to other locations with Kuwait as their base.

The Iraq Special Measures Law was established in July 2003. It is a temporary law with a four-year term limit and it is due to expire at the end of July. The government decided to extend the law for only another two years because the future course of America's Iraq policy is uncertain. Opposition parties are voicing objections to the extension, arguing: "Iraq says the SDF deployment will be unnecessary, given a rising mood in the US for a pullout of its troops from Iraq."

14) US military conducts fighter jet training at Atsugi after 7-year hiatus; Residents complain about noise

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Abridged)
May 15, 2007

The US Navy began night landing practice (NLP) for jet fighter attack planes on May 10 at its Atsugi base stretching over the cities of Yamato and Ayase in Kanagawa Prefecture. Yesterday as well, their metallic sounds cut through the night in the touch-and-go training. There is no agreement in written form between Japan and the United States to avoid conducting such training at the Atsugi base. However, NLP for jet fighters and other noisy aircraft had not been conducted over the past six years in response to local communities' tenacious campaign against NLP. Local communities and their residents are repulsed by NLP that was suddenly resumed at Atsugi for the first time in seven years.

According to Kanagawa's prefectural and municipal governments, the US Navy normally conducts NLP for low-noise aircraft at the Atsugi base. On May 10, however, US Forces Japan informed Kanagawa Prefecture and its base-hosting municipalities that the US Navy would conduct NLP for fighter attackers at the Atsugi base for a period of three days, May 10 and May 14-15, due to bad weather at Tokyo's island of Iwojima, which has a training airfield for carrier-borne fighter jets.

Kanagawa Gov. Shigefumi Matsuzawa lodged a protest yesterday with Capt. Justin Cooper, commanding officer, Naval Air Facility Atsugi, and requested the US Navy to stop the training.

15) Nakaima cites Okinawa's security environment as reason of concentrated US bases in prefecture

MAINICHI (Page 28) (Full)
May 15, 2007

Okinawa celebrates the 35th anniversary of its return to Japan today. Plans to consolidate and downsize US bases have been stalled and there seems to be no end to incidents and accidents involving US servicemen in the prefecture. Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima in a media interview yesterday took this view on the concentrated US bases in Okinawa: "I think they are vital for security, geopolitical, and military reasons." Nakaima has become the first Okinawa governor to cite the security environment as the top reason

since the base issue has flared up following the schoolgirl rape incident in 1995.

Nakaima's reformist predecessors -- Masahide Ota and Keiichi Inamine -- used to lament a lack of national awareness, saying, "The

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Japanese people do not regard security and base issues as their own." Nakaima's remarks can be taken to signify his view that base issues are peculiar to Okinawa.

Nakaima also expressed his hope regarding the agreed-upon realignment of US forces in Japan, including the relocation of Futenma Air Station to the coastline of Camp Schwab (in Nago), saying: "Consolidation and downsizing begin with the Futenma relocation and the move of US Marines to Guam." Once Futenma Air Station is relocated to the new site, the US military will return six facilities south of Kadena Air Base to Japan. Okinawa will still continue to host nearly 70% of US base facilities in Japan.

16) Abe raises question about CLB's interpretation of collective defense, saying "necessarily minimum level" is quantitative notion

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
May 15, 2007

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in yesterday's Lower House Iraq Reconstruction Assistance Special Committee meeting raised a question about the Cabinet Legislation Bureau's (CLB) constitutional interpretation prohibiting Japan from exercising the right to collective self-defense on the grounds that such is beyond the necessary minimum self-defense. Abe said: "I think the 'necessary minimum level' is a quantitative notion." His comment can be taken to mean that some actions must be allowed within the framework of the necessary minimum level of the right to collective self-defense.

According to the CLB's interpretation, Japan is allowed to exercise the right to self-defense only in facing the imminent danger of being attacked, adding, "the use of force must be limited to the necessary minimum level." So the CLB's stance is that without the immediate danger of coming under an armed attack, Japan is not allowed to exercise the right to collective self-defense that must be kept to the necessary minimum level.

DONOVAN